

SECTION 2

DIRECT CERTIFICATION

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DIRECT CERTIFICATION

Use of the Direct Certification System

- **It is mandatory that all Child Nutrition Program School Food Authorities conduct a match for eligible children at least once within the first 30 operating days of the current school year.** Matching may not be conducted prior to July 1st of the current school year, and may not be conducted more than 30 calendar days prior to the first day of school. Match results that certify children for free meals must be placed into effect within three calendar days of receiving the match results. Households of children matched for free meals must be notified of their free meal benefits within ten days of certifying the child for free meals.

Obtaining and Using Match Results to Certify Eligible Children PL 108-265

- For details on how to conduct a Direct Certification match online, reference the **CNP Direct Certification Manual**.
- Direct Certification match results override Household Application results. If a current Household Application with income information contradicts the direct match results, the Direct Certification match results must be taken at face value and the child shall be certified for free meals for the entire school year. The certifying official must document on the Household Application that the child was directly certified and keep the Application on file along with the direct certification match results.
- If a household submits a Household Application with a FS, CA, TANF case number, but the child(ren) is(are) not listed as a match in the match results, the LEA must certify the child(ren) for Free Meals by taking the *complete* Household Application with FS, CA, or TANF case number at face value.
- The Direct Certification System certifies households without their request or permission. **If a household refuses the meal benefits, the LEA must discontinue the benefits immediately and document the refusal.**

Obtaining Additional Match Results

- Upload File and State Match results will report a DES Decision Date for each student. The DES Decision Date is the date DES determines the student is eligible for DES benefits. Direct Certification match results will include the DES Decision Date as a tool to assist LEAs in performing multiple uploads or State Matches throughout the school year. The DES Decision Date will provide a means to filter or sort match results to exclude 'old' information from previous uploads. **The LEA approval date is the day the LEA runs a Direct Certification match and receives confirmation of eligibility. The DES Decision Date may not be used as the first day of eligibility unless it falls on the same day as the LEA approval date.** If a school decides to re-match to obtain the most current version of match results, their Benefit Issuance Document (BID) must be edited accordingly.

Benefit Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the household notifies the LEA that they are no longer eligible for TANF, FSP, or CA benefits the LEA may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Default to an existing income application for the current school year, if one is on file, to determine meal benefits, or • Obtain an income application for the household and certify the child as appropriate. • If a current application is not on file, or cannot be obtained, the child must be transferred into the paid category and a notice of adverse action accompanied by an income application must be sent to the family. • When certification determines an increase in benefits, the change is effective immediately and MUST be implemented within three operating days. Parents should be notified in accordance with LEAs standard procedures for notifying households of approval for benefits.
Timing and the Direct Certification System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DES updates their system nightly. This means that schools have access to the most current eligibility information DES has available. If a student does not match on the initial match, try matching the student the following day. If the student still does not match, it can be assumed the child is not eligible for free meals through Direct Certification and should be placed in the paid category. The family has the option of completing an income application.
Verification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verification of eligibility is not required for children who have been certified using the Direct Certification match system, which includes Data Entry, Upload File and State Match, as these children are automatically verified when a Direct Certification match is performed.
Documentation and Record Keeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each Local Education Agency shall print a report that identifies those children directly certified via State Match. Similarly, a report must also be printed to indicate those children that are directly certified via File Upload (Standard Format/SAIS ID Search), and Data Entry. Direct Certification match results and/or income applications for those students who have been directly certified shall be kept in a separate file from all other income applications. Documentation of direct certification must be kept on file for three years following the last claim filed.
Security and Tracking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All access into the system is tracked by usernames and passwords to ensure proper use of the direct certification data. LEAs are only permitted to obtain direct certification data for their school district.

FREE AND REDUCED PRICE PROCESS BEST PRACTICE

STEP 1

Utilize eligibility status from previous year for the first 30 operating days.

STEP 2

After July 1st and no more than 30 calendar days prior to the first day of school, conduct a District Wide Upload File Search (SAIS ID or Standard Format) prior to mailing out income applications to families at the beginning of the year.

STEP 3

Obtain the school's documented migrant/homeless/runaway list from the school's liaison responsible for assisting migrant, homeless, and runaway students.

Note: The list should consist of student names, dates, and the migrant/homeless/runaway liaison's signature.

STEP 4

Students that were included in the match results or part of the school's documented migrant/homeless/runaway list should be placed in the FREE category and a Notification Letter for free meal benefits should be sent to the household within ten working days of certification.

STEP 5

Send Household Applications for Free and Reduced Price Meals to families/students that were not included in match results or on the school's documented migrant/homeless/runaway list, without overtly identifying those students already qualified for Free meals.

STEP 6

Using the returned Household Applications, determine eligibility status based on income and household size or on an FDPIR, Cash Assistance (CA), or Food Stamp (FS) case number.

Send notification of meal benefits to families who qualify within ten working days of the receipt of the application.

Note: Household Applications listing FDPIR, CA, or FS case numbers must also have the child(ren)'s names and an adult signature to be considered a complete application and qualify the child(ren) for free meals.

Send Notification Letter for denial of free meal benefits to families who do not qualify based on income or who have submitted an incomplete application within ten working days of determining the eligibility of the student(s) on the Household Application.

